THE SHAKESPEARE ASSOCIATION BULLETIN

SAMUEL A. TANNENBAUM, *Editor*

Contributing Editors

MRS. ROBERT CARLTON MORRIS ROBERT M. SMITH WILLIAM T. HASTINGS

Advisory Board

JOSEPH Q. ADAMS HARDIN CRAIG WILLIAM ALLAN NEILSON

VOL. XIX APRIL, 1944 NO. 2

CONTENTS

PAGE

Hamlet's Sea-Voyage—Bandits or Pirates?.....*T. M. Parrott* 51

The Elizabethan Legacy (A Glance Towards the Renaissance).....*George C. Taylor* 60

Senecan Influence on Elizabethan Tragedy: A Re-Estimation.....*Henry W. Wells* 71

Excessive Goodness A Tragic Fault.....*Ruth L. Anderson* 85

Published quarterly, in January, April, July, and October, by The Shakespeare Association of America, Inc., 601 West 113th Street, New York.

Subscription rate, $2.00 per year, postpaid. Single copies, fifty cents.

Membership in the Association includes annual subscription.

All correspondence relating to the conduct of the BULLETIN should be addressed to Dr. Samuel A. Tannenbaum, 601 West 113th Street, New York, N. Y.

Other matters relating to the work of the Association should be referred to the Secretary

Copyright, 1943, by The Shakespeare Association of America, Inc.

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2026

https://archive.org/details/shakespeare-association-bulletin_1944-04_19_2

HAMLET'S SEA-VOYAGE — BANDITS OR PIRATES?

A Reply to Professor Lawrence

By T. M. PARROTT

PROFESSOR LAWRENCE'S essay, *Hamlet's Sea-Voyage* (PMLA, March, 1944), like all his Shaksperian studies, is both interesting and enlightening. With his main conclusion that the great soliloquy of the fourth act—*"How all occasions do inform against me"*—was written to remind Shakspere's audience at this point that Hamlet "had in his temperament that alteration of decision and procrastination which led both to the ultimate consummation of his revenge and to his death in the duel", I am in complete agreement. Whether Shakspere attained his purpose in this composition would seem to be an open question since the First Folio text, which represents the acting version as early as 1623, omits the soliloquy. Apparently Shakspere's fellows thought then, as most actors have thought since, that such a reminder was quite unnecessary. Apart from Professor Lawrence's main conclusion, however, there are certain statements in his essay, minor yet not without importance, which as a joint editor of the Parrott-Craig critical edition of the *Second Quarto of Hamlet*, I feel compelled to answer, since it is assertions in our Introduction that he seems, at least, to challenge. These statements deal in the main with the *Ur-Hamlet,* with the relation of the German play, *Der Bestrafte Brudermord* (*B.B.*), to the *Ur-Hamlet* and with the relation of both these to Shakspere's play.

Professor Lawrence holds that not everything in *B.B.* reflects the work of Kyd, author, as he and we both believe, of the *Ur-Hamlet,* and he feels that it is difficult to draw the line between what comes from the original and what has been added in the German play. With the first of these statements I quite agree, but I strongly incline to reject the second. Instead of its being hard, I believe it to be fairly easy to draw this line. There is, of course, no absolute cer-

tainty in these matters; we are not even *certain* that it was Kyd who wrote the *Ur-Hamlet*. Our conclusions must rest upon a balance, more or less decisive, of probabilities. Now if *B.B.* is a German version, however corrupt, of Kyd's play, we are, I think, justified in believing that wherever it preserves the action of Kyd's source, the Belleforest narrative in the *Histoires Tragiques,* it reflects the essential features of the *Ur-Hamlet,* but *also* where it contains features differing from this narrative, but corresponding to the known technique and practice of Kyd, it again reflects his work.

What are these differing features? In the first place *B.B.* opens with a Prologue in which Night calls upon the Furies to kindle the fire of revenge against the King of Denmark who has murdered his brother and is now lying with that brother's wife. This is old Senecan stuff, such as we might expect from so good a Senecan playwright as Kyd. The inciting moment in *B.B.* is the Ghost's appeal to Hamlet to revenge his unnatural murder. There is no Ghost in the story as told by Saxo and Belleforest; this too is a Senecan feature which we may confidently ascribe to Kyd, all the more since it recalls the vengeful Ghost of Andrea in *The Spanish Tragedy*. In *B.B.* the climax of the action is reached by means of the play within the play, presented by Hamlet before the King, at which the King's behavior confirms in Hamlet's mind the story told him by the Ghost. Likewise in *The Spanish Tragedy* the protagonist uses this device, a play within a play, to attain his revenge. Again we may ascribe this alteration of the narrative to the art of the English playwright. In the falling action *B.B.* introduces the motif of counter-revenge pursued against Hamlet by Leonhardus (Laertes), son of the murdered Corambus (Polonius in Q2, Corambis in Q1). This again is a feature wanting in the narrative, but plainly a device of the English playwright to complicate and intensify the action. Finally we have in *B.B.* the bloody catastrophe in which Hamlet achieves his revenge, but perishes in attaining it, a true Senecan catastrophe parallel to the massacre at the end of *The Spanish Tragedy*. In the narrative Hamlet, after achieving his revenge, becomes King of Denmark and pursues a long career of craft and conquest until he falls in

battle, an awkward, if not impossible, denouement for a play.

What, on the other hand, do we find in *B.B.* that does not fall into one of these two divisions: (a) features corresponding to the original narrative, and (b) features evidently due to the art of the English playwright? Structurally very little indeed; at most a comic scene between the boor Jens—note the German name—and the courtier Phantasmo. Additional comic matter, probably due to a German reviser of Kyd's play, appears in the behavior of the Ghost who boxes a sentry's ears, in the foolish babble of Corambus, in the mad Ophelia's erotic pursuit of Phantasmo, and in Hamlet's story of the made-up bride, as also in his comment on the costume and behavior of the actors. None of this is germane to the action; it is inserted by the reviser to raise a laugh in an audience incapable of appreciating the tragic matter of the play.

There is, however, one scene, hitherto unmentioned, of prime structural importance which now demands special consideration. This is the scene (*B.B.* IV, i) on Hamlet's sea-voyage where his cunning enables him to escape from the assassins commissioned by the King to kill him. Professor Lawrence hesitates to attribute this scene to Kyd, suggests that it may be due to the German "translater"—I should prefer the term "reviser"—and that the pirates of Shakspere's *Hamlet* may originate with Kyd. This, however, seems to me so unlikely as to be almost incredible. Let us consider the matter.

One of the first and most important tasks confronting an Elizabethan playwright's attempt to dramatize the story of Hamlet was to excise the account of his long year's stay, with various adventures, in England—immalleable dramatic material—and bring him back to Denmark as promptly as possible. It was imperative to invent some device to expedite this return; Shakspere uses that of the pirate ship; *B.B.* that of Hamlet's escape from his would-be assassins. Which is more likely to be the original, i.e. to represent the action of the *Ur-Hamlet?* Unquestionably, I think, that of the German play. Let us examine the scene. I use Professor Lawrence's brief summary.

Hamlet is discovered upon an island with two bandits, agents of the King, who tell him they must kill him. Hamlet pretends to agree. "But," he says, "I will give you a signal: I will turn my hands toward heaven, and the moment I stretch out my arms, fire! Aim both pistols at my sides, and when I say 'Shoot', give me as much as I need, and be sure to hit me so that I shall not be long in torture." They grant him this, but just as they fire he throws himself forward on his face so that they shoot each other. (Professor Lawrence omits the not unimportant detail that Hamlet then makes assurance doubly sure by stabbing their bodies with their own swords.) Hamlet then searches the bodies of the villains and finds a letter "to an arch-murderer in England", commanding his death, in case their attempt fails. He resolves to return to Denmark, not by water, but by post from the next town.

Here certainly is a scene of lively action such as Kyd loved, action heightened by the futile attempt of the unarmed Prince to snatch a sword from one of the bandits, another detail which Professor Lawrence omits. It brings before the eyes of the audience the craft of Hamlet in tricking the murderers to kill each other, and also something of the savage nature of the hero of Saxo, "and in all probability the equally savage hero of Kyd" (Lawrence) as in revenge he stabs the still moving bodies of the bandits. Moreover the scene breathes the same air of grim humor which pervades the death-scene of Pedringano in *The Spanish Tragedy,* a scene in which a hired assassin comes to a violent and unexpected end when he thinks himself safe from harm. It is certainly more in the manner of Kyd than in that of the German reviser who introduced the Jens-Phantasmo scene and other comic matter. Professor Lawrence objects that "it does not solve the dramatic problem of getting Hamlet back to Denmark; it leaves him marooned off England." That statement is not quite accurate, for Hamlet himself announces in this scene his intention of returning. His mode of conveyance, "by post" is, to be sure, awkward enough, and Professor Lawrence scores a point when he says that this "sounds more like the eighteenth century than the sixteenth". I would suggest, however, that this brief state-

ment at the very end of the scene may represent an addition by the reviser to take the place of an excised scene in the *Ur-Hamlet* which showed the Prince on his way home. Marks of cutting are visible throughout *B.B.,* notably, for example, in V,i, where a brief soliloquy by Hamlet must be a condensation of one of Kyd's long tirades. If, on the other hand, the whole scene is the work of the reviser, as Professor Lawrence suspects, we must credit that unknown person also with enough dramatic skill to anticipate the scene, as is done in III, 10, where the King gives explicit orders to Hamlet's companions to murder him. But if, as I believe, both this anticipation and the scene on the island come from Kyd, we get a positive answer to what Professor Lawrence (p. 59) considers only a probability, *i.e.,* the guilty foreknowledge of Hamlet's companions on the voyage, Shakspere's Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

Professor Lawrence further objects that the "two agents of the King are called in one scene 'attendants' and in another 'bandits' which suggests that two hands may have been at work." This is not quite accurate. The word "attendants" comes from the English translation of *B.B.;* the German is "Diener", in III, 10, and in the stage-direction in IV,i; the word "bandits" does not occur in the dialogue of the German, but only in the scene heading of IV.i, "Zwei Banditen" and in speech-headings of this scene: "1. Bandit", "2. Bandit"; it is probably due to the reviser or even to a German copyist. Certainly the "Diener" of III, 10, whom Hamlet derides as "saubere Bursche" and "noblen Quantschen" (rogues) are the so-called "bandits" of IV,i. The mention in both scenes of the letter with the warrant for Hamlet's death shows that Kyd knew of this incident in the Belleforest narrative, but realized that the mere discovery of the letter by the Prince would not suffice to bring him back to Denmark promptly and that some incident must be devised to effect this return. The affair on the island, considering the probably melodramatic nature of Kyd's *Hamlet,* seems really a happy inspiration.

Let us suppose, by way of hypothesis, that the idea of intercepting Hamlet by pirates on his voyage had dawned on Kyd. It might have done so, for, as Professor Lawrence

remarks, pirates were in Kyd's day "a constant menace in the North Sea and familiar to everyone in fact and fiction". If Kyd had adopted this device, however, he would have found himself confronted with material—the sea-fight and Hamlet's boarding the pirate ship—difficult, if not impossible to present upon the Elizabethan stage. Nor is there anything in contemporary fact or fiction, as far as I know, to suggest to Kyd the honorable treatment of Hamlet by the pirates and his return to Denmark upon their ship rather as their patron than their prisoner. And, further, if we accept Professor Lawrence's suggestion and attribute the intervention of the pirates to Kyd, we must go on to suppose that the German reviser cancelled it and composed in its place the effective scene on the island so wholly in Kyd's style. This, frankly, seems quite impossible.

Kyd, as we have seen, allowed himself a free hand in shaping the material of his source into dramatic form. He invented matter of his own to start the action, the Ghost's demand for revenge; he introduced his own device of a play within the play at the climax, and he closed his work with a Senecan catastrophe. It was otherwise with Shakspere. Working here not upon a narrative, but recasting a play which had already achieved a certain success upon the stage, he was by no means so free. As a matter of fact, he seems to have followed the scenario of his source, the *Ur-Hamlet,* very closely, making few structural changes. Why, indeed, should he have done so? There lay before him in ms. a capital plot of a thrilling melodrama. His task was not to alter it, but to elevate it into a tragedy by developing and heightening the character of the protagonist. He proceeded to metamorphose the "savage hero" of Kyd into a Renaissance prince, "the glass of fashion and the mould of form", a prince characterized by those who know him best as "gentle", "dear" and "noble" and finally dismissed from the stage with Horatio's farewell: "Good-night, sweet Prince", all these epithets being, of course, Shakspere's dramatic device to impress this conception of his hero upon his audience. Now, in the process of re-writing the old play Shakspere comes to the scene upon the island. He must at once have said to himself: "This will never do". The total

effect of this scene is serio-comic rather than tragic, and Shakspere at the end of the century was writing for a better trained and more sensitive audience than Kyd's in the middle eighties. We can hardly believe that Shakspere was willing to exhibit his hero at this crisis of his career as a clownish acrobat and a stabber of dying men. Yet, if the scene is to be elided, some other device must be invented to solve the dramatic problem. Invention, as we know, was not Shakspere's strong point; he preferred as a rule to take a story as he found it and to expend his energy upon characterization. If the story in his source failed him, he was apt to borrow a suitable incident from his reading, or, indeed, from earlier work of his own, as in the substitution of Mariana for Isabella in Angelo's bed. Shakspere turns at this point, we may suppose, in his re-writing Kyd's play to the narrative of Belleforest that lay behind it. There he finds the incident of the altered letters which Kyd had elided, and the discovery and alteration of the letters by Hamlet go back into Shakspere's text. It would be difficult, however, to represent this action on the stage, and accordingly Shakspere only lets us hear of it in Hamlet's report thereof to Horatio. Yet, as Shakspere of course realized, this alteration of the letters would save the hero's life in England, but would not bring him back at once to Denmark. Some other incident must be devised, borrowed, if possible, from Shakspere's reading.

Now the play that immediately precedes *Hamlet* in Shakspere's dramatic career is *Julius Caesar,* and this play, as all the world knows, is based upon a careful and conscientious study of Plutarch's *Life* of the great Roman. In the very beginning of that *Life* Shakspere found the account of Caesar's capture by a pirate ship and of his resolute behavior toward the pirates, which so impressed them that he was not "kept as a prisoner, but rather waited upon by them as a prince". These words are from North's *Plutarch,* used by Shakspere and quoted by Professor Lawrence, and the last phrase "waited upon by them as a prince" seems to have been the spark that fired the mind of the playwright struggling with his "dramatic problem", the more so, no doubt, when he recalled the fact that the pirates had set

Caesar free upon the payment of his ransom. The nature of Hamlet's ransom is indicated in his letter to Horatio: "I am to do a good turn for them", *i.e.* secure their pardon, or perhaps, as Professor Lawrence suggests, their promotion from pirates to privateers.

It cannot be asserted that this solution which Shakspere hit upon in the hurry, perhaps, of composition, is altogether satisfactory. It raises too many questions such as those neatly put by Professor Lawrence himself. But questions of this kind are asked by critics in the study, not by auditors in the theatre. They were the less likely to be asked since Shakspere, realizing that the sea-fight and Hamlet's bargain with the pirates were unpresentable on the stage, deftly packed them into the aforementioned letter. What the audience did not see, but only heard reported, would not trouble them, and if, perchance, a scholar in the theatre recognized the source of this solution, he would probably be more disposed to praise than to blame the author for his ingenious "imitation" of a classic master. And finally this adaptation of a piece of Plutarch for a dramatic end must have given Shakspere himself a sense of inward satisfaction, since it served to bring out again that "alternation of decision and procrastination" in the character of Hamlet, which, as Professor Lawrence so well shows, is the inspiring motive of the famous soliloquy. Had Hamlet not procrastinated in his revenge, he would not have found himself on a ship bearing him to his death in England; had he not been capable of swift decision, he would not have boarded the pirate ship single-handed—"I alone" he writes "became their prisoner." Shakspere had little chance in his re-writing of the old play to show in his hero the virtue, expected in a Renaissance prince, of a soldier; this borrowing from Plutarch gave him such a chance, and he slightly altered his source to bring this virtue out; there is no mention in Plutarch of Caesar's boarding a pirate ship, on the contrary he seems to have been rather ignominiously seized and held to ransom.

If the argument so far has been valid, we may reach, I believe, certain conclusions which Professor Lawrence, if he does not reject, yet seems at least to be doubtful of. The first is that the island scene in *B.B.* comes from the *Ur-*

Hamlet, i.e., from the hand of Kyd. The second is that the business of the pirate ship is Shakspere's, and is his deliberate alteration both of his immediate source, the old play, and of the source of that play, *i.e.,* the Belleforest narrative. Both Kyd and Shakspere solved the pressing dramatic problem in a manner consistent with their artistic temperament and their technique: Kyd by a scene of violent action; Shakspere by a quiet report of off-stage business which would pass muster with an uncritical audience and yet in the mind of a thoughtful hearer would tend to heighten and ennoble the character of his protagonist.

Lawrenceville, New Jersey.

THE ELIZABETHAN LEGACY

(*A Glance Towards the Renaissance*)

By George C. Taylor

THE humorist of today is often humbly apologetic for being a humanist, confessedly on the defensive. At the very moment in history when he has the best opportunity in centuries to assert the indispensable quality of humanism as a constructive force in a world in the process of destruction, the humanist is permitting the two most potent forces, science and sociology, to impress upon him their conception of what humanism is. And he is permitting this despite the fact that, though they have occupied the most strategic points of vantage conceivable for them to occupy as shaping forces of civilization, recently they have been utterly incapable of preventing mankind from going into the worst tailspin in a thousand years. Take, for example, Harvard University—perhaps the most independent educational institution in the United States. Is it taking advantage of the incapacity of the great physical and social sciences to prevent the great international throw-back to the beast in man, without the aid of humanistic and religious forces, even as traditionally defined? At Harvard, for a century the citadel of courageous faith in the humanities as the main force enabling man to live above the level of the brute, those now in the saddle are willing to accept a position which relegates humanism to a distinctly secondary position as a decorative and graceful handmaiden to her great sisters—science and sociology. Howard M. Jones, Dean of the Graduate School of Harvard, is emphatic:

> "The war probably ended an epoch in education, notably in the public schools and in certain colleges. That epoch, largely colored by the theories of John Dewey, made the development of individual personality the primary aim of education.
>
> .....
>
> The truth is, advocates of the humanities are lost, bewildered men. They have not, despite innumerable committees and conferences, recovered from the shock of discovering they were of no particular importance to the Government. They lack any central philosophy, and in contrast to the definiteness of aim among scientists and technologists, they have as yet been unable to construct any coherent educational philosophy governing the years to come."[1]

Jones is less representative of the trend of thought as to the humanities than his more extreme confrere, Carl Sandburg; but of this more anon. One turns with relief from the American voices thundering with god-like finality out of Sinai to a quiet, simple statement in a journal called *Antiquity* (March 1943):

> "This joint meeting of some four hundred men and women interested in ancient literature and civilization, organized by the Societies for the Promotion of Hellenic and Roman Studies and supported by the Classical Association, desires to emphasize the vital importance of providing in any plan for education after the War adequate facilities for these studies, upon which as the center of the humanistic tradition European civilization has hitherto rested, and which, in the opinion of this meeting, cannot be neglected without grave consequences."

We are free to choose either a simple, strong statement of faith or a cynical cry of despair as to the humanities. We can label the whole division of learning as Walter Raleigh does *Paradise Lost,* "a monument to dead ideas."

Dead ideas! It is against this superficial conception that a great body of ideas (with the Renaissance and Elizabethan body of ideas especially in mind) can ever die, that this discussion is to be pointed. And it is this ludicrously false conception, now prevalent, which makes it pertinent to pass in quick review some of the more important Elizabethan mental attitudes of thought to which we might profitably return; the fact that the modern world has forgotten them has doubtless contributed very largely to plunging us into the abysmal night of cruelty and international anarchy of the present.

Before passing in review the more important of these Elizabethan ideas, it seems advisable to pave the way by very briefly carrying the war into the country of the cocksure modern thinker who still, in the face of facts, dares to place himself on record as being certain of what he denominates mystically as progress. It seems just as advisable, on the other hand, too, to admit very frankly that existing alongside the magnificent body of potent thought of the Elizabethans was a vast body of preposterous conceptions, as low and debasing as that corresponding body of conceptions now accmpanying some of the finest and highest thought contributions of our

own day. Certainly, it is no longer possible, is it? for those of us living today to *look down* upon the Elizabethan civilization or upon any civilization previous to our own, when at best we have become simply companions in degradation and in misery with them. If the ideas of an age are to be judged by the level to which they lift us in civilization, we have now every reason to be sceptical about the soundness of our accepted present thought systems. It is hardly possible for any thinker of integrity and courage to deny, on any ground except that of a kind of spiritual hunch, that the thoughts of feelings of contemporary man, as one views the world picture of today, have been characterized during the last few years in very great part by the lowest and most bestial of impulses; and this, as already suggested, both in the world of thought and of emotion. One has a right to demand, too, that we think now not in terms of our relatively safe North America but of the world so reduced in size that Tokyo is closer to San Francisco, New York to Ceylon, than Chicago was to New York in pre-locomotive days. Never, certainly not for several hundred years, has the world picture taken on, in its entirety, a sorrier and more sordid hue, a more hopeless impression of what organized man is capable or incapable of perfecting in the way of peace on earth, good will to men. Men have shown in our day an utter incapacity to settle disputes beyond national boundaries by a method other than violence, and this both as to the present war situation and as to all organized planning for a post-war world. In this post-war planning all realistic thinkers are agreed on one thing only, that the most gigantic organization ever projected for a police force will be necessary to control the forces of hate and lust for power which have broken over the dams of restraint of centuries and are now flooding the earth. Only the wishful thoughts[2] of the philanthropic and social-minded give us hope that mankind can recover from its present orgy of blood and self-extermination without having recourse to the lowest bases of appeal. Science, greatest of all good forces, naively proceeding to turn over to mankind its splendid achievements on the assumption of the natural goodness of man, has been forced to witness the present-day throwback to cruelty and savagery accelerated tremendously by his own inventions.

Having learned at last that man can revert overnight from the cilivized being he is superficially to the fiercest of animals, we shall, in planning for the future, now surely not soon forget what we ourselves or others are really like; the finest of living things, the gentlest and most god-like, with a capacity of returning with incredible celerity to the lowest levels of the lowest animals.

To parallel the hideousness of our present behavior we must concede the ghastly stupidity and beastliness, both of a similar and different kind, in the Elizabethans themselves, a beastliness even more incongrous to us, of course, than our own of today. As with them, so with us, intimately connected with the finest manifestations of the human spirit in its varied activities run the lowest manifestations of human nature. As with us, they are literally legion. It is impossible, however, to cite one intelligent Elizabethan who would have been as unwilling as we are today to concede the imbecilities and bestialities of both common men and leaders which went hand in hand with the idealities of his age.

We may regale ourselves to the full with some of the stupidities[3] of the age of Elizabeth, neither more nor less *characteristic* of that age than similar manifestations of the depraved aspects of the human spirit of our age. There was, for example, the Elizabethan and Renaissance habit of sacking cities, wholesale murders of defenseless mothers and children, such as you and I are now guilty of. Whoso drew the longest bow ran his brother down, you know, as we run men down today. Only, of course, to us the atrocities of a former age seem much less excusable than those of our own. There was the mock trial of Dr. Lopez, Spanish or Portuguese physician to Queen Elizabeth, his drawing and quartering in view of the multitude, a sop to an orgy of Jew hatred, after a trial in which the much idealized Earl of Essex of today's romance led the prosecution, playing the part of Gratiano at Shylock's trial. There were some one-hundred-and-odd forms of cruel and unusual punishments for some one-hundred-and-odd crimes, many of which seem negligible today. The tortures to which men of all ranks were subjected then for minor crimes made the ordinary

hanging or beheading seem merciful. The most eloquent of all testimonies of the horrid nature of these punishments is the wording of our own Constitution of the United States, which declares that we in this country shall not be subjected to "cruel and unusual punishments." Perhaps the most unusual of these punishments is most vividly illustrated by the way "witches" were executed: they were strapped to a heavy chair which enabled the executioner to "wring their necks," a phrase now fortunately applicable to the execution only of chickens, or to a wife by some facetious husband. Perhaps the most absurd barbarities and childish credulities of the Elizabethan age are brought home to us by Montaigne's ridicule of the prescriptions of the great medical men of his acquaintance: a second low mental level is to be found in treatments recommended by the Elizabethan health books most widely current in the good old days of Elizabeth. Those who find most amusing the ignorance of past civilizations will find endless delight in the medical ideas of the days of Sidney, Raleigh, Shakspere, Bacon, Montaigne, the last three surprisingly modern in many of their conceptions. Notice these exhibits:

> *A Bag for Falling Sickness* (Epilepsy):
> *Take species Electuary de gemmis, Lactificantis Almansoris,* of each one-quarter of an ounce, Mace one dram, Mariorum, Judy Spica, Liquer Alves, and red Stirax, of each halfe a dram, each stamped alone, make a silke bagge and weare it on the left breast; when it is besweat, then let it drie again.
>
> Things to hang about the neck "highly commended of all the famous Phisitions: it is the smell or savour which doth most vehemently withstand evil—Some write also that the red Corall and the Emerald hath the same vertue.
>
> Crab-lice grow of a stinking matter that nature expels through the skin.
>
> The Philosophers do agree altogether in this—they be that have much haire upon their breasts are at all times more manly, stout and couragious.
>
> *For Heart burn:*
> Some do hang about their neck for this disease the herbe Agrimony. Others do hold in their mouth the stone in the Carps head.
>
> *For stone in the kidneys:*
> There is . . . much commended the bone of a Hare, which we call the Hares spring, powdered and drunk.
>
> Learned are of the opinion that children bring this disease (Measles) out of the mothers wombe when borne.

> Rennet of Fawnes that die in their dams bellies is commended for the biting of snakes.
> Garlike driveth away snakes through his smell.

Montaigne who refers time and again to the stone in his own bladder comes to our aid as to the ridiculous drugs in vogue in France in his day.

> "Even the choice of most of their drugs is in some sort Mysterious and divine: the left foot of a tortoise, the urine of a lizard, an elephant's dung, a mole's liver, blood drawn from under the right wing of a white pigeon, and for us who have the stone (so scornfully do they take advantage of our misery!) the pulverized droppings of a rat, and other such tomfooleries that are more suggestive of magic and spells than of a serious science. Not to mention their pills, to be taken in uneven numbers, the setting apart of certain days and festivals in the year, of certain hours for gathering the herbs of their ingredients, the grim scowl, the wise and learned looks and demeanor which they put on, and which even Pliny remarked upon with dirision."[4]

Perhaps the worst aspect of the Elizabethan mind is to be found in their Fear of Shadows: the prevalence of the fear is best illustrated by some of Shakspere's leading thinkers, not by all. Hotspur and Edmund are as completely cynical as any modern as to the supernatural world.

Richard III, with all his crimes one of the most fearless and resolute of Shakspere's kings, is a typical example:

> "*Shadows* tonight [after his dream] have brought more terror to the soul of Richard than can the *substance* of ten thousand soldiers, armed in proof and led by shallow Richmond."

The hair of the sceptic, Hamlet, "stands on end" as the Ghost appears. Macbeth, who dares the "witches" to do their worst, goes completely to pieces as the ghost of Banquo rises. Brutus alone controls his stoic self as the ghost of Caesar rises; but he is shaken to his foundations. Shadows haunt Lady Macbeth to the point of actual madness. What Shakspere himself feared no one knows, but we do know that Montaigne and Bacon both stand in awe as they come to the threshold of revealed truth on the borderline of that truth got by Nature's light only. Who did not?[5] So does Milton in his poetry and in most of his prose.

Having conceded these many debased conceptions prevalent in the Elizabethan age, we may now, in fairness, take

a look at many of the more admirable mental developments of the Elizabethan age, many of which we might not be the worse for receiving today.[6]

LOOKING BACKWARD

The attitude which gave Rome some lasting greatness was its respect for Greece and its drafts upon Greece's cultural legacy: the attitude which saved the Elizabethans, and indeed the Renaissance, from drifting back into barbarism was its respect for and drafts upon Greece and Rome, rather than intoxicated enthusiasm for its up-to-dateness. Drafts on Greece, Rome, Elizabethan England, Renaissance Europe, even upon Victorian England as to their humanistic principles, could not certainly get us into any worse fix than we now are in.

ANTIQUITY FORGOT MEANT RETURN TO BARBARISM

If there is any one attitude of modern times which might reasonably explain the otherwise inexplicable prevalence of cruelty and barbarism to which we have had a throwback, it lies in our adolescent attempt to cut ourselves off from every tradition with which we are familiar, in nursing the delusion that the worst of the new is better than the best of the old. In what other way can one explain what seems to be the inexplicable plight of the present? We have recited, with childish delight, the thousand gadgets invented to save us trouble, our endless stream of creature comforts, Symond's springs and eiderdown comforts, upholstered Pullmans, *et al,* as evidence of our superiority over the Greeks and Romans and Elizabethans who lacked these gadgets. The Renaissance, despite the fact that it too relished material comforts and inventions of instruments of construction and destruction, and was (relatively speaking) materially far in advance of the Greeks and Romans, never was guilty of producing one great thinker, with the possible exception of Bacon, who was silly enough to assume that this necessarily made them superior to the ancients. Despite their tremendous advantages in inventions they realized that without going back to other civilizations, to the experience of mankind, they were not half-civilized, that only through constant contact with antiquity could they survive as other

than the savage creatures they realized we naturally are. Montaigne's credit to Amyot for civilizing France by translating Plutarch is beyond bounds. "We other ignoramuses had been lost if this book had not lifted us out of the quagmire: thanks to him we dare to speak and write, . . . he is our breviary."[7]

If we are to take seriously Sandburg's "I tell you the past is a bucket of ashes" as representing the point of view of even semi-reasonable persons of our time, it is easy to see how humanity has crashed over the precipice recently and in a sense deserves to go on crashing over precipices at whose feet lie the uncounted millions to whom all our yesterdays could bring no light.

NATURE OF MAN

As a result, in part, of his knowledge of antiquity, there came to the Elizabethan thinker an accurate knowledge of the nature of man which, previous to this war, we had not, or, having it, blithely ignored in our social and educational plans for the present and for the future. This statement will, at first blush, seem an absurd exaggeration, in view of our supposed knowledge of the nature of man through our highly developed various techniques of thought. With psychology, educational theory based on hundreds of questionnaires, psychoanalysis, behaviorism, and other schools *ad infinitum* as aids, we think we are in a far better position to understand the nature of man than were the ancients or the Elizabethans. All this technical knowledge, telling us exactly what we will do or not do under a given test of circumstances, judged by its results in the last decade, has proved totally unavailing to prevent what has sent us all into our present international anarchy. The assumptions which the Elizabethans had as to the nature of man might very possibly have saved us. Our assumptions led us ino a fool's Paradise, a dream from which we were rudely awakened.

What were some of our basic assumptions? Well, for one thing, that human nature was naturally good in itself, warped to evil by institutions, not guilty because of its own natural evil propensities; that man was naturally the gentlest of the animals, which at times he certainly is (in certain

individual instances, like Socrates) but not the cruelest of the animals which he also certainly *is*. No good Elizabethan thinker would have forgotten that. For another, we assumed that the less work we had to do and the more leisure we had, the better off and the more civilized we would automatically become. The most remarkable assumption was that man would use his spare time for the elevation of himself and others. This even today is assumed by so mental a person as Flexner who falls into this optimistic trap.[8]

No honest Elizabethan looking into his own heart and into the experience of the race would have accepted any such assumption. But with us today, especially in America, such assumptions, despite the war (which is described as natural), are still held in many intellectual circles as axiomatic gospel truth. Even should the war end exactly as we in America wish it to do, that will not alter by a hair the essential falsity of these assumptions. For no one in his right mind, as he projects himself forward into post-war planning, will be willing to be caught off guard again by reason of sentimental assumptions as to the natural goodness of man, as he bears in mind the thousands of chances of violence exploding now in this or in that quarter of the globe. Our awareness, just arrived at, of the vast quantity of human dynamite ready to go off at any moment by reason of the most trivial of causes, either in national, international, or in labor *vs.* capital disputes, under the government either of benevolent or malignant single rulers, is now a tacit admission on our part that the Elizabethan estimate of the creature man was saner than ours is. Certainly no great Elizabethan thinker would have been intellectually surprised, however much he may have been emotionally shocked, by a Hitler whom we would have thought impossible, or by what nations will resort to to get the better of another, by what any class will do unethically to establish its power over another. It is in connection with his plans for a newer and better world that Bacon reminds us, "Ill to man's nature . . . hath a natural motion strongest in continuance; but good a forced motion strongest at first." Where shall we find among our leading modern thinkers realistic talk to us about the constitutions of our own natures? From them we get,

instead, an endless line of unctuous flatteries as to our unselfishness in relation to all others, as a basis for our doctrine of unlimited rights of all for security irrespective of effort, ability, or appreciation. We certainly might profit by a return to the honesty of statement on the part of Elizabethan thinkers as to the fundamental nature of man, his capacity for great heights of fineness and goodness, his unbelievable depths of depravity and evil—inextricably intertangled in almost every one of us. Surely, a civilization based on a recognition that the material upon which all social orders are built is in part weak, brittle, and defective is a sounder civilization than that founded on the thought of thinkers unwilling to reckon with us as we really are. We must be on guard against a throwback at all times. No government can endure in which the men who establish it are too little aware of the imperfections of human nature.

INDISCRIMINATE LOVE OF MAN

This brings us to an aspect of Elizabethan thought fundamentally sound and convincing in comparison with our own. Ours has become a completely indiscriminate love of man. Each of the social units under a vast number of social schemes of organization is supposed to be of about equal importance in spite of their indisputable differences in importance and fineness. Montaigne makes a statement which, if it is true, might bring our vast building for the future tumbling about our ears like a house of cards or rather a bombed cathedral. And it *may* be true.

> "There is a greater difference between many a man and many another man than between many a man and many an animal."[9]

Why must the leading modern type of thinker hasten to deny this? Because, of course, his plans are based on exactly the opposite assumption. He can't carry on his schemes for organization of man if he admits this. The idea, however, though never as pertinently put as in Montaigne as to the vast abyss that chasms between low types and high types of men is characteristically accepted by Elizabethan thinkers. The hired murderers in *Macbeth* say of themselves in modern vein, "We are men, my liege." To which Macbeth replies with the discrimination of the Renaissance:

"Ay, in the catalogue ye go for men,
As hounds and greyhounds, mongrels, spaniels, curs,
Shoughs, water-rugs, and demi-wolves are clipt
All by the name of dogs. The valued file
Distinguishes the swift, the slow, the subtle,
The housekeeper, the hunter, every one
According to the gift which bounteous nature
Hath in him clos'd; whereby he does receive
Particular addition, from the bill
That writes them all alike; and so of men."

Surely we are in sore need today of clarifying and refreshing our ideas as to the vast differences in worth and value of men of today and tomorrow if we hope to rebuild a better and different world from that established on the sentimental doctrine of the similarity of all men.

[*To be concluded*]

---

[1]*The Saturday Review:* "Citizen or Mechanic?"

[2]*Ibid.*

[3]"The Credulity of the Elizabethans." Madeline Doran, *Journal of The History of Ideas,* Vol. I, pp. 151 ff.

[4]*The Essays of Montaigne,* translated by E. J. Trechmann. London: Oxford University Press, 1927, p. 222.

[5]Marlowe is supposed to have been atheistical, and so were others, says Buckley in his *Aetheism in the Renaissance: Faustus* does not bear bear this out.

[6]There is no attempt in this article to cover in any sense exhaustively the ideas of philosophies of the Renaissance. See Hardin Craig, *The Enchanted Glass;* Paul Oscar Kristeller and John Herman Randall, "The Study of the Philosophies of the Renaissance," *Journal of the History of Ideas,* Vol. II, pp. 449 ff. The emphasis here is on the present day need of some few Renaissance mental attitudes.

[7]E. J. Trechmann, 1927, Vol. I, p. 352.

[8]*The Humanities After the War,* p. 487.

[9]Trechmann, I. 458.

SENECAN INFLUENCE ON ELIZABETHAN TRAGEDY:

A Re-Estimation

By Henry W. Wells

DURING the last few years widely conflicting statements have been made regarding the role of Seneca in the field of Elizabethan drama. A problem which a few years ago seemed virtually settled has clearly been reopened for discussion. Two somewhat narrow and extreme points of view now appear to have been presented. Both these views are unsatisfactory, primarily because both have, it seems, been taken without a sympathetic study of Seneca himself. It is far too facile to hold that the Elizabethan drama owes its admittedly worst defects, namely, violence of action and affectation of phrase, in any marked degree to the Roman playwright. One group of scholars, including Cunliffe[1], Lucas[2], Eliot[3], Mendell[4], and a considerable number of dramatic historians, devote their attention exclusively to tracing the influence of Seneca, and thus leave the reader too easily to assume that this is the outstanding future of the plays discussed. Cunliffe describes a small group of early dramas as "Senecan plays," and further describes the Senecan influence in other plays which might, in his opinion, fall under such a category. A number of younger scholars, notably Willard Farnham[5] and Howard Baker[6], have more recently contended that Seneca is a dominant influence only in a handful of closet dramas which never saw the stage nor in any way determined its history, and in a few similarly isolated and unimportant works, such as *The Misfortunes of Arthur,* given only in private performances. Baker refuses to regard *Gorboduc* as a "Senecan play" and finds the total influence of the Latin dramatist far less than earlier critics have asserted. But Baker's case is exposed to much the same objection as Cunliffe's; indeed it is the more pregnable. For while Cunliffe says nothing as to the non-Senecan elements, which, so far as his criticism goes, may to his mind be either great or small, Baker not only asserts the importance of the native element but definitely attempts to diminish the case for Seneca. Both sides deal in special pleading; neither

seems concerned to discover what the essential charms of Seneca's plays at any time have been. They exploit a part of their subject at the expense of the whole. Scarcely a single field in English literary scholarship has been cultivated so exclusively in the combative or dissertational spirit as this of the Senecan influence. Truth has a way of escaping from too overzealous lovers; while they fight, she flees to persons of a more temperate and broadminded attitude. The essence of the case is that no discussion of literature can ultimately prove satisfying which fails to proceed from a warm and sympathetic understanding of all the authors concerned. The abuse of Seneca, or at least the neglect of his own intentions, though understandable enough in the circumstances, has impaired our grasp of the Elizabethans themselves.

In a few rare cases, to be sure, one encounters statements made about Seneca in England which have no direct bearing on the relative importance of his influence, either more or less, but proceed from an apparent understanding of the affection for him which the Elizabethans so clearly had. Thus Miss Ellis Fermor[7] is one of the few writers who has mentioned Seneca often and at the same time in a sympathetic spirit. It is significant that she discusses the period in which Seneca was actually best understood, that of the satirical dramatists Marston, Chapman, Jonson, Webster and Tourneur, rather than the earlier period from Sackville and Norton to Kyd and Greene, where he has thus far been chiefly discussed but where he was more superficially understood by the playwrights, both as to his philosophy and his poetry. Miss Fermor points out that some of the eloquence with which the English playwrights relate the moral order to the stars come from the inspiration of Seneca's own poetry. But she has, unfortunately, written no article or book on the subject, and the prevailing tendencies still remain quite the opposite of her judicious position. Not only the newer critics, who champion the native forces in Elizabethan drama, but even the opposing critics, as Cunliffe, Lucas and Mendell, rarely have a good word for Seneca himself or a critical analysis of his art. T. S. Eliot, it is true, occasionally commends him for a happy phrase or line, but more often

writes in the familiar vein of condescension. He confesses it difficult to imagine why the Elizabethans held Roman tragedy in such esteem. The last paragraph of Mendell's recent book, *Our Seneca,* is, paradoxically, almost the only place in his ample volume in which he speaks sympathetically of the Latin dramatist.

The qualities which Seneca is said to have conferred upon the Elizabethans are, unhappily, precisely those which English playwrights possessed long before Seneca became a pronounced literary fashion. Bombast, fustian, violence and brutality are to be found throughout both Mystery and Morality plays in far more egregious forms than in Seneca. The Elizabethans, therefore, inheriting these blemishes in content and style, cannot have contracted them from reading Seneca. It may, of course, be argued that inasmuch as these qualities undeniably exist to some extent in Seneca, their existence in him ingratiated his work to the Elizabethans. But the Elizabethans hardly need to have troubled themselves to resort to another literature in order to enjoy what was sufficiently conspicuous in their own. With their explorative and inquisitive temperament, the novel always attracted them more than the familiar. Hence the likelihood would be that they would seek for qualities which they had themselves only in less developed forms or even barely on the horizon of their most extended vision. I suspect that the goriness and the rhetorical thunders of Seneca, usually called his chief attractions, were in fact among the least. Further explanation of his vogue is certainly called for, especially when we consider how great is the outstanding distinction between the Elizabethans and Senecans, for while the English possessed one of the liveliest theatres in the world and hence among the most theatrical of plays, Seneca wrote in a somewhat decadent age of the theatre and is certainly one of the least theatrical of all dramatists. Recent criticism has even increased this paradoxical picture by the customary statement, hardly demonstrated beyond dispute, that the Senecan plays were never acted in antiquity; they were most certainly performed in the sixteenth century.

The whole question really hangs on the literary interpretation of Seneca, and here lies the most palpable limitation

in our recent literature on the Latin works, which has been conspicuously lacking in literary appraisal, either in terms of Elizabethan criticism or of our own. Few discussions of the relation between the Roman dramatist and the Elizabethan playwrights, for example, allude to any differences to be detected between any one of the ten plays of Seneca and another. The assumption appears to be that he was a minor and monotonous author whose works are all precisely of a piece. Actually one of the plays ascribed to him, the *Octavia,* is almost certainly by another hand, and very possibly other plays or considerable parts of them are spurious. The outstanding question of the authorship of all the plays is, of course, still within the realm of doubt. Furthermore, by whomever the tragedies were written, they are certainly the reworking of earlier plays by different hands, and may reasonably be expected to preserve traces of at least some of the differences of their diverse sources. The ten tragedies do in fact differ rather widely and it is therefore highly uncritical to speak of Seneca as being wholly of a piece. A brief summary may not be amiss. *Octavia* is an historical tragedy on the politics of Seneca's own times; he is himself, of course, a character in this peculiarly frank and audacious play. *Hercules Cetaeus* is an exceptionally long, highly idealized and religious drama which celebrates the cult of Hercules with curious analogs to the Christian passion play, resurrection play, and the *planctus* of the Virgin (Alcmena, mother of Hercules, has a scene analogous to Mary before the cross). The *Phoenissae* is a fragment in two scenes, or perhaps it should be regarded as two fragments. The first is peculiarly introspective; it presents Oedipus's longing for death. The second scene depicts with a fine tragic irony the political dilemma of Thebes. The *Troades,* like its Euripidean source, has more the quality of a choral lament than of a play. *Thyestes* is not only by far the most gruesome of the tragedies but the most insistent in its study of what the Elizabethans commonly term Machiavellian evil and deceit; it remains the most profoundly pessimistic and disillusioning of the plays. *Medea* is a unique and impassioned study in black magic and still blacker hate. *Hercules Furens* possesses a dignity and quiet depth unapproached in Seneca's other secular tragedies. The three remaining plays, *Oedipus,*

Agamemnon, and *Phaedra,* are his least original works, dilutions and brutalizations if not actually perversions of his Greek originals to accord with the imperial Roman taste. Yet they tell three of the world's most moving stories in a fashion by no means nerveless or disspirited.

It is as difficult for us to remember as it is obvious for us to perceive that the Elizabethans knew these great myths primarily through Seneca. Most of the Elizabethan dramatists had read no Greek drama; only a few had read—and very imperfectly grasped—a few of the plays of Euripides. The greater poets, Aeschylus and Sophocles, were either wholly unfamiliar or known so imperfectly as virtually to be unknown. To all the Elizabethans from the most to the least learned Seneca stood for tragedy in its highest perfection. He enjoyed substantially as great a lustre for them as Shakspere for us. To conclude that he gave sanction and encouragement to all the worst defects of the admittedly uneven Elizabethan drama is far from a satisfactory statement of the case. It is more profitable to ask why Seneca was obviously one of the most widely read authors in school and university, in the scholar's study and in the libraries of courtier and gentleman. The answers are hardly obscure yet they are scarcely to be found in the books and essays dealing specifically with the drama. The volumes by Lucas and Mendell, for example, seem almost deliberately to avoid a direct analysis of Seneca's work itself, as though the subject were unprofitable, while they give instead much space to his social, historical and literary background and to his own political career. Similarly Cunliffe and Kastner[8] discuss the plays themselves far less than they discuss the Italian, French and English imitations. Almost all the scholars are generous in citing parallel passages and possible or probable borrowings of lines, while the very basis of the subject, the interpretation of Seneca himself, remains unexplored. Yet it follows almost inevitably that the grounds for the popularity of his plays should afford a reliable clue to the fundamental influence which they exercised on the English playwrights.

The customary statements offer inadequate solutions. We must look well beyond the unhappy attractions of the Sene-

can excesses in word and deed. His rhetoric, when judged by most renaissance standards, hardly seems dazzling. In hasty summaries of his art the amount of physical horror has surely been exaggerated; nine-tenths of his pages are either entirely free from this quality or possess it in no greater measure than the Greek tragedy or the general norm of tragedy throughout the world. The Elizabethans could and often did go to their native traditions for their theatrical ghosts without consulting the very few examples in the Latin playwright. The division of the plays into acts and scenes is clearly superficial, both for the Latin and the English. Nor is it sufficient to regard Seneca as the most popular vehicle for stoicism, since this observation scarcely explains why his plays proved so much more attractive than his prose. The explanation of his high reputation lies apparently along other lines.

To observe that his plays give the best Latin version of a number of the most attractive classical myths is more to the point, though hardly enough. Ovid excels in both the cheerful and the pathetic stories of the gods and heroes, Seneca only in the most tragic episodes. Naturally the late medieval writers in England, as Lydgate, turn to him as master of the distinctly tragic tale. But Seneca meant considerably more to English sixteenth than to the English fifteenth century. It is this growing popularity in the Shaksperian period which calls for explanation.

There are special features of Seneca's feeling, thinking and poetic style obviously alluring to the European world of Shakspere's times and even more attractive to the English than to the continental mind. Indeed some of the same grounds causing a revival of interest in Seneca in the latter part of the sixteenth century have caused a definite revival of interest in him during the first part of the twentieth century. Seneca affords an instance of a writer who becomes of universal interest through his success in representing his own times and in foreshadowing the new temper springing up in the world about him. Like the Elizabethan poets and the nervous generation of his critics, Rupert Brooke and T. S. Eliot, he witnessed a period of marked material progress and spiritual decay: vast, cruel and unscrupulous

world ambitions on the one side and the loss of a religious and moral faith on the other. Only three generations after Horace and Virgil, the spiritual climate of Rome had vastly changed. In its germinal form appeared the pessimism of Juvenal, Hadrian and Claudianus, the grave melancholy of the later Roman historians, and of Aurelius and Boethius. Seneca is first and by no means least of the august line of visionaries who prophesy the decline and fall of the classical spirit and the imperial power. He reflects a society already blighted with the curse of Atreus and marked for ultimate destruction.

This means that the tragedy of Seneca is a spiritual progenitor of the Elizabethan tragic mind which culminates in *Hamlet*. Seneca's disillusionment, pessimism and pervasive melancholy is therefore a part of the background against which Hamlet stands. Europeans had reached a stage in which the most heroic and imposing physical conquests were being made overseas, while all was not well at home and in the heart. The tragic Philip II in Spain, sick within his religious cell, and the hardly less tragic queen of England, frustrated even in her triumphs, symbolize the age. Man's intellectual and spiritual struggles conjured up dark and magnificent clouds of gloom strikingly similar to those unrolled before the eyes of Seneca after the triumphs of the Augustan era and to those uncovered to Mr. T. S. Eliot when, in 1927, he composed his eloquent Introduction to a reprint of *Seneca His Tenne Tragedies,* as edited by Thomas Newton in 1581.

In at least two other respects Seneca held a still more definite appeal to the Elizabethan mind. In the first place, one notes the political trend in the morality of his plays. Baker's views may in this connection be amended or at least supplemented. Baker distinguishes between what he terms the Senecan and the political interpretations of *Gorboduc.* This play is not, he holds, a tragedy reviewing the purely literary themes in Seneca but a political tragedy dealing with current problems of the state. Yet there can hardly be a tragedy dealing more boldly with political problems, and in this respect a better model for *Gorboduc,* than *Octavia,* a play notably popular in renaissance England. If Sackville

and Norton were to follow Seneca as their literary and dramatic master, how could they do so more readily than in writing on political themes? Seneca himself must have known the political character of many of the Greek masterpieces, as Aeschylus' *Persae,* the *Seven Against Thebes* and the *Eumenides,* with its celebration of the Areopagus, and those plays of Sophocles and Euripides which treat the Theban legend. Witnesses to this are the *Troades* and the *Phoenissae* which Seneca produced in emulation of the Greek dramatists. Both directly and indirectly Seneca deeply influenced Elizabethan political moralists. Among his maxims dramatically stated are cynical propositions often identical with maxims regarded by the Elizabethans as newly sanctioned by Machiavelli. The first fifty lines of Act Two of *Thyestes,* of all Seneca's plays the most popular among Elizabethans, contain, for example, some of the best known "Machiavellian" commonplaces, as that a wrong is avenged only by a worse[9] and that "integrity, truth, loyalty, are private virtues; kings do as they will."[10] The Senecan plays are thus important sources not only for the dramatic form, extravagant diction and violent action of the most somber Elizabethan tragedies, but for a large part of their political thought, and a direct source for many of their political aphorisms.

In the second place, Seneca appealed to the Elizabethan mind because of his spokesmanship for a new individualism. As the power of church, emperor and parliament waned and the typical Renaissance dictatorships of kings and princes arose, the doctrine of the super-man or the transcendent earthly hero or demigod, ruling by divine right, came into prevalence. Far more than the Greek dramatists, Seneca gave sustenance to this doctrine. He is himself the apologist for the new age of Roman individualism. Thus Virgil's Aeneas, symbol of the Roman state, belongs to the previous age, while Seneca's Hercules, or super-man, belongs to the period of Nero and his successors. Seneca's technique betrays the changing viewpoint. The heroes in Aeschylus and Sophocles, as Prometheus, Orestes, Oedipus and Ajax, consult with the dramatic chorus, thus suggesting the background of a parliamentary or democratic system.

Their conduct in this regard is reminiscent of Homer's treatment of the conferences of Greek and Trojan chieftains, and the comparatively reasonable character of that arch-counselor, Odysseus. Seneca's heroes, on the contrary, stand alone. Two of his finest plays, one of these by far the longest, deal with Hercules, type of the ideal hero and object of Seneca's special reverence. Others of his works are severely focused in turn upon Nero, Atreus, Agamemnon, Oedipus, Phaedra, Medea, and Jocasta (in the *Phoenissae*). It is significant that his untheatrical heroes and heroines are commonly engaged either in dialogue with the most colorless of confidants or in the delivery of the longest of soliloquies. Contrary to Shakspere's technique, the hero's soliloquies are vastly enlarged while the Senecan equivalents of Horatio subside into virtual nonentity. All the chief Senecan characters dwell on colder, lonelier heights than their Greek antecedents. They materially assisted in forming the intellectual doctrine of the super-man typical of Elizabethan thought, a man, indeed, often termed "senecal" or in some way consciously associated with Seneca's heroes. Jonson's Sejanus, Catiline and Cicero, Marston's Andrugio, Macilente and Masinihsa, Chapman's Bussy, Claremont, Cato, Pompey and Chabot, Marlowe's Tamburlane, Greene's Alphonsus, Chettle's Hoffman, and Shakspere's Richard III, Julius Caesar, Augustus Caesar and Coriolanus, all owe something to this Senecan concept of a supreme focus of power within an individual. Seneca probably did more than any other author to encourage the English dramatists in their concept of the tragic hero. In politics, morality and psychology their age demanded such an ideal. Seneca, familiar to English readers since the time of Chaucer, provided inspiration to satisfy the new need.

Seneca's plays owe much of their force to their narrowness. They represent a vision distinctly more limited than that of the Greek but are simpler to grasp and by no means ill-fitted to dramatic expression. In addition to his powers of concentration upon the essential dramatic struggle of the play, Seneca also has rare powers of concentration upon the individual phrase. Thus to the Elizabethans he appeared not only as a myth-maker but as a phrase-maker. While mod-

ern scholarship has inevitably taken some notice of his considerable aphoristic powers, it has too often dwarfed these beside his violence in image and deed. The frequent quotation from his aphorisms in the Latin, by Kyd and Marston, and the still more frequent English paraphrases by Jonson, Chapman, Greville and Daniel sufficiently illustrate this important phase of his contribution.

We may now sum up this re-estimation of Seneca's attraction for the Elizabethan playwrights. The latter never felt the real force of Greek tragedy itself. We today, who almost inevitably compare him with the greatest Greeks and Elizabethans, tend to dwarf both his poetry and his tragic force between two necessarily overawing heights. But the Elizabethans were almost equally ignorant of their own greatness and of that of the Greek masters. To them Seneca towered virtually alone upon a plain, decidedly dwarfing his somewhat servile imitators in England, Italy, France and Spain. Although the Elizabethans cannot have seen Seneca in the juster historical proportions in which we know him today, they were far less prejudiced against his substantial achievements in tragedy and poetry. For if he is a much lesser poet than Aeschylus or Shakspere, he is by the same tokens a much greater one than Garnier or Samuel Daniel.

After a general review of the grounds of Elizabethan enthusiasm for Seneca the dramatist, one stands in the best position to summarize the degree and significance of this influence. It becomes increasingly clear why both Cunliffe's book and Baker's may induce a biased outlook. We need the broader perspective to correct too easily formed prejudice. On the one hand, Farnham and Baker are presumably right in contending that Seneca was unessential to the development of Elizabethan drama in all its more striking forms. The English playwrights had long cultivated as a native tradition a theatrical sense, a love of linguistic diffusion, physical violence and horror, a folk-lore of ghosts, an efficient system of playwriting, a pseudo-Machiavellian ethic, and a philosophy of life quite without the absolute need of Seneca. What stoicism they desired they might requisition from Boethius as well as from him. The plays of Preston, Edwards, Peele, Marlowe, and Greene were built

essentially on native or renaissance traditions sufficient to produce the rise of Shakspere and the supreme age of England's theatrical, dramatic and poetic art. The spirit of pure poetry, as nursed to its heights by Sidney, Spenser, Raleigh and their immediate associates, did not strictly require the aid which Seneca had to give. Ovid certainly meant more to Shakspere and to Marlowe, to Beaumont and to Fletcher, than did Seneca. Plautus almost certainly had a more direct influence on English comedy than Seneca on English tragedy. The theory that English tragedy evolved from Senecan tragedy, implied if never directly stated in many of our textbooks, is then, as Farnham and Baker rightly contend, a theory unsustained by evidence.

Yet a tendency to slight the importance which Seneca actually did hold in the enrichment of Elizabethan tragedy is as dangerous as the inclination to find him the core of this tragedy. Especially is it manifestly erroneous to hold him responsible for its worst crudities and defects. This fallacious tendency springs from the condescending attitude by recent critics toward Seneca himself, a condescension which has too often concealed what Seneca has to offer. Elizabethan tragedy was, on the contrary, on terms of warm and fruitful friendship with Seneca, even while it was in no sense tributary to him or dependent upon him for its existence. It was not created by him; but it was at all times enriched by him. It is worthy of special note that its grandeur increased precisely as the understanding of Seneca became deeper. His major contribution was not, as sometimes implied, to the more primitive or external phases of English drama, to its ghosts, its thunderous phrases and bloody actions or its scene divisions, so much as to its genuine poetry, it tragic energy and its moral doctrine. Seneca cannot rightly be described as a dull incubus weighing down the Elizabethans and keeping certain of their more learned playwrights, as Kyd, Marston, Daniel, Greville, Jonson and Chapman, from soaring wing to wing with Shakspere. For Seneca also nourished Shakspere's own mind, in part by direct contact, though more often indirectly. The true importance of Seneca has in our literary histories become unwittingly distorted by Cunliffe's well-known designation of a handful of early plays,

from *Gorboduc* to *The Misfortunes of Arthur,* as "Senecan plays." Similarly Nash's famous allusion to Kyd and to the early *Hamlet* as under the spell of Seneca has—especially because of the Hamlet reference—also thrown undue weight upon our view of the early importance of Seneca. It is only too clear that the playwrights from Sackville to Kyd had not thoroughly digested their Seneca; and the early, pale and academic tragedies of Daniel and Alexander contain relatively poor specimens of what Seneca had to give. As always, the servile imitators are the most sterile followers. Actually the period of Seneca's deepest influence is not that of the first English translations, from 1559 to 1581, nor even the period of Kyd and Marlowe, but that of the decade extending from Shakspere's *Julius Caesar* (1599), and Marston's *Antonio and Mellida* (1599) to Chapman's *Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois* (1610) and Jonson's *Catiline* (1611). The earlier Elizabethans were, on the whole, too volatile and optimistc to appreciate the deeper values in Seneca. Understanding ripened with the years and with an increasing familiarity with his work both in its Latin and English forms. Moreover the rapid rise of English satire in the last few years of the sixteenth century aided in the re-interpretation of Seneca, who is almost equally a satirist and a tragic poet. Marston, who began his literary career as a Juvenalian satirist, by no means illogically concluded it as a neo-Senecan tragic poet. Chapman followed the same course. These two scholar-playwrights are of all Englishmen the most seriously affected by him and incomparably more affected than the more timid imitators in *Gorboduc, Horestes, Tancred and Gismunda, The Misfortunes of Arthur, Locrine, Selimus, The Spanish Tragedy* and *Titus Andronicus.* If Shakspere is indeed the chief author of *Titus Andronicus,* as commonly thought probable, our conclusion must be that when writing that melodrama he had a rather superficial grasp of the Senecan spirit and a much more serious understanding of it when writing Hamlet's tragedy. The Senecan influence appears at its worst in *Titus,* inviting all the harshest that has been said, and so unjustly said, by English critics who know Shakspere so much more intimately than they know Seneca. The Senecan influence was thus actually at its height at almost exactly

the year that Shakspere's *Hamlet* was written. For Seneca was guide to a school of English tragic poets which projected the sober temper, both ethical and philosophical, of the first years of the seventeenth century. Revived by the Elizabethans, Seneca came to his own on the threshold and in the earliest years of the Jacobean period. Here his influence, at the hands of Shakspere, Jonson, Marston, Greville, Chapman, and Webster, in such plays as *Hamlet, Sejanus, Sophonisba, Mustapha, The Conspiracy and Tragedy of Charles, Duke of Byron, Bussy D'Ambois,* and *The White Devil,* is noble and almost entirely salutary. Just as the earlier enthusiasts for Seneca in the period of Kyd, like his modern critics, commonly brutalize him, so the later Jacobeans tend to do so. Fletcher is in this regard, as in so many other respects, transitional between the age of Shakspere and that of Shirley. Such tragedies as *Valentinian* and *Bonduca* show the Senecan influence neither at its strongest or weakest, and neither at best nor worst. Massinger and Ford, bringing the wheel full circle, are more likely to give a debased version once more, although Massinger's *Roman Actor* is a dignified tragedy clearly indebted in spirit and in style to the great Roman moralist, poet and rhetorician. Only by the time that Shirley wrote his major tragedies, or just before the closing of the theatres, does the romantic influence utterly dominate and the Senecan influence temporarily become an irrelevant consideration in a study of English tragedy.

From these considerations it may be stated with some assurance that our criticism of the Senecan influence has been much impaired by an uncritical tendency of scholarship for some fifty years to view Seneca's plays with feelings ranging from condescension to contempt. Our first requirement is a serious and reasonably sympathetic study of Seneca himself. If he is to be associated with some of the worst lines of the English playwrights, he may also be associated with many of their best. He attracted the Elizabethans not so much because of his stylistic mannerisms or his use of physical brutality as because of his real poetic merits, his mirror of an age of material progress and spiritual decay, his increased emphasis upon political or public degeneration,

and on the role of the individual. The stoical doctrine and aphoristic style are important but on the whole less important than the foregoing. Finally, the most fruitful influence of Seneca was not, as the bulk of our criticism leads us to infer, chiefly in the period from Sackville to Kyd, but in the far greater period marked also by the rise of English dramatic satire, from Marston's *Antonio and Mellida* to Chapman's *Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois,* and centering in the artistic triumph of Shakspere's *Hamlet.*

Columbia University, New York, N. Y.

---

[1]Cunliffe, J. W., *The Influence of Seneca on Elizabethan Tragedy,* 1893.
[2]Lucas, F. L., *Seneca and Elizabethan Tragedy,* 1922.
[3]Eliot, T. S., *The Tenne Tragedies of Seneca,* translated by Thomas Newton, 1927.
[4]Mendell, C. W., *Our Seneca,* 1941.
[5]Farnham, Willard, *The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy,* 1936.
[6]Baker, Howard, *Induction to Tragedy,* 1939.
[7]Ellis Fermor, U. M., *The Jacobean Drama,* 1935.
[8]Kastner, L. E., and H. B. Charlton, *The Poetical Works of Sir William Alexander, Earl of Stirling,* 1921.
[9]Scelera non ulcisceris, nisi vincis. (*Thyestes,* 1956).
[10]Sanctitas pietas fides privata bona sunt; qua iuvat reges eant. (*Thyestes,* 218-9).

EXCESSIVE GOODNESS A TRAGIC FAULT

By Ruth L. Anderson

IN his essay "Of Moderation" Montaigne says: "We may so seize on vertue, that if we embrace it with an over-greedy and violent desire, it may become vitious. . . . A man may love vertue too much, and excessively demeane himselfe in a good action. Gods holy word doth apply it selfe to this byase: *Be not wiser than you should, and be soberly wise. . . .*" Montaigne is saying here that even in goodness there must be moderation. He is saying that through excessive goodness, as well as through that which is regularly considered vice, man may cause sorrow for himself. Those who say that there cannot be excess in virtue "because it is no longer vertue If an excesse be in it, doe but jest at words," he adds. "The Archer that overshoots his marks, doth no otherwise than he that shooteth short." It would seem that in a world of mingled good and evil man must be practical if he succeeds; he must not be "too noble for the world" if he expects to be secure in it.

The point of view in this passage from Montaigne is related closely to an idea current during the Renaissance that those who are good are likely to trust others and so be defenseless against the attacks of evil in disguise. There persisted from earlier times a traditional warning against credulity and an emphasis upon the need for distrust and the use of craft in dealing with others. Danger in credulity had been recognized by Aristotle. Among persons to whom one does injury he lists men who are trustful instead of cautious.[1] Plato states that in youth good men often appear to be simple and are easily practiced upon by evil because they have no examples in their own souls of what is evil.[2] Plutarch regards distrust on the part of subjects as a protection against tyranny. Demosthenes was right, he says, in declaring that distrust is the greatest safeguard states possess against tyranny, "for that part of the soul with which we trust is most easily taken captive."[3] Writings on statecraft produced during the Renaissance preserve this emphasis upon the importance of distrust as a quality to be possessed

by princes. The point of view that one may be "too noble for the world" and so bring evil upon oneself and others carries over into Shakspere's plays as a tragic fault. In *Timon of Athens* it becomes the primary theme.

It would be right to say, indeed, that for the Renaissance distrust was considered not only an important but an essential quality of a successful prince and credulity a grave danger to anyone in high office. The very nature of government as viewed by the period required of a ruler practical insight into the motives of those about him and the ability to conceal his own purposes. It will not at all times permit the plain dealing which is required in private affairs. Let us follow through a line of thinking presented by Pierre Charron in his discussion of prudence in government.

Having confirmed an observation which he ascribes to Aristotle, that the subversion of states springs generally from treachery and deceit, Charron raises the question, "Why may not the State save it self by the same Methods that were practis'd to ruine it, and retort the Artifice of Factious and Wicked Male-contents back upon their own Heads?" In his implied answer to the question he says:

> "For a Man to be too Squeamish in these Cases; to play constantly above-Board and upon the square; and deal with these Men according to the Rules of that Rigorous Equity and Plain-dealing, which Reason and Conscience require from us in private Affairs, is inconsistent with the Nature and Measures, nay, with the very End of all Government; and the Event would often be the betraying and losing all, and Sacrificing the Public to an Unreasonable Scruple."[4]

Charron concludes, as do Machiavelli and others, that a ruler ought to be a lion in the field and a fox at the council table, "or, as that Divine Saviour, who was Truth it self, hath exprest himself upon another occasion; He may be a subtle Serpent, but still a harmless Dove."

Charron goes on to say that distrust is absolutely necessary in a prince and that credulity is a "very grave Fault" of "most dangerous Consequence." A prince who confides too much in others lays himself open to being "ill-used;"

he invites others to practice craft against him and to cause great mischief through seeking advantage for themselves. A prince should make use of the diffidence "which consists in keeping ones Eyes open, ones Mind in suspense, suspecting and providing against every thing." He should maintain an air of openness at the same time that he distrusts. From his distrust should spring dissimulation, "whose Business it is to open the Face, but cover the Heart." There is no way to manage public affairs without dissembling. "Feints and Pretences are absolutely requisite, not in Military Conduct only, and time of War . . . but even in Peace and Civil Administration towards one's own Subjects," although in the latter case they should be used more sparingly. In matters of little consequence a prince may seem opposed to dissembling in order to have a reputation for frankness with which to shield himself when he dissembles in important matters.[5]

Bacon agrees with Charron in his essay "Of Simulation and Dissimulation." The weaker sort of politicians are great dissemblers, Bacon says. If a man has keen penetration of judgment, a habit of dissembling would be a hindrance; if he lacks this penetration, "then it is left to him generally to be close and a dissembler." The greatest statesmen have maintained a reputation for veracity and frankness. They have known when to use dissimulation and at such times their reputation for honesty has prevailed. Bacon identifies three kinds of dissimulation. After discussing the advantages and disadvantages of the practice, he draws the following conclusion as to the nature best suited to a prince: "The best composition and temperature is to have openness in fame and opinion; secrecy in habit; dissimulation in seasonable use; and a power to feign, if there be no remedy."

The reason for this tendency to link the use of wariness and dissembling with statecraft lies of course in the fact that during the Renaissance men were regarded as being wicked at heart. According to one trend of thought, persisting from early Christian times, government is one of God's remedies for man's corruption—an institution necessary as a means of direction and coercing man to right living. From

the time that Adam and Eve fell from grace men have been deceitful. For proof of the continuing importance of wariness a prince need only reflect upon the condition of the time:

> "To observe, how all Mankind are made up of Falsehood and Deceit, of Tricks and Lies; how Unfaithful and Dangerous, how full of Disguise and Design all Conversation is at present become, but especially, how much more it abounds near his own Person, and how manifestly Hypocrisie and Dissimulation are the reigning Qualities of Prince's Courts, and Great Men's Families, above any other places whatsoever."[6]

Because the times are evil and man is bent upon self government, then, a prince should trust only a few, and to these he should not give "all the Rope but constantly keep one End in his own Hand." Bacon's statement in his essay "Of Friendship" that one scarcely ever finds a man whose advice is not "bowed and crooked" by his own ends is a fair representation of what the Renaissance thought of man. It follows that in order to be successful men must not only distrust others but must conceal their own aims. This is particularly true at court, where deceit abounds. "The plain, and free, and open," Charron says, "such as we commonly say carry their Heart in their Faces, are by no means cut out for the Business of Governing; they often ruine and betray both themselves and their People."[7] In a world where nearly all men are wicked nobility may be a frailty. It is likely to be a frailty unless it is linked with a sense of the practical.

The notion that one may be undone by goodness underlies the portrayal of several of Shakspere's characters. Generally speaking, goodness and trustfulness are said to be characteristics of men who become victims of villainy, and these qualities give plausibility to the success of the villain's scheme. "Simple, plain Clarence" believes Richard III, as do Hastings, Derby, and Buckingham at the outset—"simple gulls." Only Derby learns to distrust early enough to escape death. Othello is of a "free and open nature"; Cassio is an "honest fool"; Desdemona is of "so free, so kind, so apt, so blessed a disposition, she holds it a vice in her goodness not to do more than she is requested." Iago recognizes and plays upon the quality of goodness in the characters against whom he works. In doing so, he speaks the language of the right-

eous fluently for he is an arch-dissembler. Edmund in *King Lear* has a credulous father and a brother

> Whose nature is so far from doing harms
> That he suspects none. (I, ii, 195-196)

On "foolish honesty" Edmund's practices "ride easy." Posthumus is "too good to be where ill men are." Because of his credulity he is tricked by Iachimo.[8]

The portrayal of these characters reflects the well-known Platonic notion that the soul perceives beauty and goodness only in the degree that it is itself good. Noble people see the good; not being evil, they are trustful. The ugly or vicious soul actually dislikes the good. Shakspere makes use of this latter view in accounting for deeds of villainy.

> Wisdom and goodness to the vile seem vile:
> Filths savour but themselves. (IV, ii, 38-39)

says Albany to Goneril in *King Lear*. Cassio has "a daily beauty in his life"—Iago hates him. For similar reason Oliver is prompted to take action against Orlando in *As You Like It*.

Nobility of soul is an element leading to tragedy in the case of Hamlet. *Hamlet* is a complex play and one can never arrive at everything that is meant by it, but it seems certain that Shakspere regarded Hamlet as one of the noblest—if not the noblest—of his heroes. And he meant that nobility to be a cause of tragedy. When Hamlet learns that Claudius is a murderer he pulls out his notebook and makes an entry.

> That one may smile and smile and be a villain. (I, v, 108)

The incident reveals a fundamental trait in Hamlet; he is "free and open" and does not generally suspect others. For the Elizabethan this trait would be more meaningful than for us. A prince should know that evil is frequently disguised as good; in fact, he should expect it to be so disguised.

Much has been written about Hamlet's failing to kill the King at prayer. If the incident is examined in relation to Shakspere's technique there need be no doubt, I think, but that Shakspere meant to show that Hamlet has not yet learned to penetrate appearances. Shakspere seldom mis-

leads his audience. Through preparation for an incident by depicting a mood which inclines a character toward future action, through portraying briefly an important character about to appear, through use of commentators, such as Enobarbus in *Antony and Cleopatra,* or of soliloquies in which a character announces intentions and motives, he sets the audience right; frequently he directs attention to a particular point to be observed in what follows. Hamlet knows nothing about insincere prayer (and Desdemona and Othello know nothing about insincere vows, such as those Iago makes). Hamlet's entrance on the stage when the king is attempting to pray is skilfully placed between two speeches in which, through what the King says (III, iii, 38 ff. and 97-98), the attention of the audience is directed to the hypocrisy of the situation. The audience would then certainly note that Hamlet is deceived by the attitude of prayer and thus, immediately after the Players' production has convinced him of the King's guilt, misses an opportunity to get full revenge.

In Act V Hamlet calls Laertes a "very noble youth" shortly after the audience has heard Laertes say that he will anoint his sword with poison in preparation for the fencing match in which he expects to be revenged for the death of Polonius. The King plots the details of the match against Hamlet's nobility:

> . . . he being remiss,
> Most generous and free from all contriving,
> Will not peruse the foils. . . . (IV, vii, 135-137)

Hamlet does not peruse the foils. He becomes the victim of the tendency to take things to be what they seem when his confidence in Laertes causes him to fall into a trap set by the King.[9] As soon as he discovers from Laertes that "the King's to blame" for the fact that he is dying, he retorts the "artifice" practiced against him back upon the King's head.[10]

In *Julius Caesar,* Cassius recognizes and makes use of the quality of impractical goodness in Brutus:

> Well, Brutus, thou art noble; yet I see,
> Thy honourable metal may be wrought
> From that it is disposed. (I, ii, 312-314)

Men of noble minds, Cassius says, should "keep ever with their likes"—otherwise they are likely to be deceived. Brutus tells us that there are no tricks in "plain and simple faith," and ordinarily this is true, but there may come a time when even the good must dissemble. Strangely enough Brutus comments upon the very aspect of life which requires of man practical insight, but he fails to realize that his associates—noble though they are—are capable of yielding to ulterior motives:

> When love begins to sicken and decay,
> It useth an enforced ceremony.
> There are no tricks in plain and simple faith;
> But hollow men, like horses hot at hand,
> Make gallant show and promise of their mettle;
> But when they should endure the bloody spur
> They fall their crests and, like deceitful jades,
> Sink in the trial. (IV, i, 20 ff.)

Brutus knows apparently that little men resort to hypocrisy, but in the great cause of Rome he cannot conceive of false dealing. He imputes to the other conspirators his own high motives. Secret Romans who have "spoke the word" will not "palter." In the plot against Caesar honesty is engaged to honesty, he thinks; to believe that in so great a cause an oath is necessary is to "stain the virtue of the enterprise."[11]

Brutus is the only conspirator who strikes against Caesarism in the abstract. He is a great statesman, and only insufficient practical wisdom makes him a tragic character. He proceeds against Caesar in the way in which, according to Charron, a prince should resort to deeds of cruelty: "There is not only a Necessity that they should be reserved for the last Extremities, but that when Princes are perfectly driven to make use of them, they should go about it with a real unwillingness and great Regret."[12] If it were possible Brutus would kill the spirit of Caesar without dismembering the body. He is not, then, without some knowledge of policy and of the advantage of cautious procedure. He would have Caesar killed reluctantly, and he knows that for the common people this reluctance will give proper color to the deed:

> Let's kill him boldly, but not wrathfully; . . .
> And let our hearts, as subtle masters do,

> Stir up their servants to an act of rage
> And after seem to chide 'em. This shall make
> Our purpose necessary, and not envious;
> Which so appearing to the common eyes,
> We shall be called purgers, not murderers. (II, i, 172 ff.)

But Brutus fails to realize that even where great principles are involved men can be motivated by selfishness. He does not know, for example, as Cassius does, that the use of craft toward equals in matters of state is consistent with Mark Antony's character—and with Cassius'. Brutus becomes the victims of impractical nobility.

Coriolanus is a noble character whose pride keeps him from dissembling in a situation which would have contributed to the welfare of Rome had he performed tactfully the demands laid upon him. The play leaves no question as to his goodness. He is "too noble for the world," Menenius says.

> He would not flatter Neptune for his trident,
> Nor Jove for his power to thunder. (III, i, 256-257)

In a passage quoted above Charron states that the ability to dissemble is "absolutely requisite" in a prince not only in war but in peace. Unquestionably, opinion current during the Renaissance agreed that a prince should dissemble for the good of the state in cases of necessity. It agreed further that where the general welfare is concerned he may resort to policy with honor: "For there is a Cunning very consistent with Virtue and strict Honour. . . .[13] Menenius implies that for Coriolanus an extremity involving the state is at hand:

> Before he should stoop to the herd, but that
> The violent fit o' the time craves it as physic
> For the whole state, I would put mine armour on,
> Which I can scarcely bear. (III, ii, 33-36)

But Coriolanus is accustomed to the use of cunning only in matters of war. He adheres to a sense of honor in the abstract, a sense which is incompatible with the practical conduct life requires of men at times. Asked to return to the tribunes and repent outwardly in words and action for his earlier behavior, Coriolanus says he could not offer such pennance to the gods.

Only in cases of extremity does this loyalty to a concept

of virtue which disregards exigencies of state prove itself too idealistic. At such times the inability to regard policy as consistent with honor is likely to prove disastrous to the individual. Volumnia presents the argument of the play against this inflexible idealism of Coriolanus:

> You are too absolute;
> Though therein you can never be too noble
> But when extremities speak. . . .
> If it be honour in your wars to seem
> The same you are not,—which, for your best ends,
> You adopt your policy,—How is it less or worse
> That it shall hold companionship in peace
> With honour, as in war; since that to both
> It stands in like request? (III, iii, 39 ff.)

Volumnia would have her son speak words roted in his tongue. Since circumstances of state require it, he may do so with honor. Coriolanus resolves to make an attempt to appease the citizenry, but when he is branded traitor by the tribunes he puts aside whatever determination he had to speak mildly and to pretend. His devotion to honor in the abstract is so thoroughgoing that were he required to linger "but with a grain a day" he would not buy mercy of the people at the "price of one fair word." Banished, Coriolanus turns from Rome, wrathful at a country in which attacks can be made against honor. The underlying situation in the play is thus: A very noble man is to be elevated to the consulship, but the process requires dissembling in the observance of a custom the man sees no need for. Because of pride rising from his conception of honor the man is unable to dissemble. Coriolanus is too noble for the demands the world makes of him: he suffers for this nobility.

The notion that goodness, when not linked with distrust, may prove one's undoing is the fundamental theme in *Timon of Athens*. Timon is not cast in the mold of ordinary men. We are born to give benefits, he says. Man does not truly give when he receives. Timon could deal kingdoms to his friends and "ne'er be weary," whereas the typical man seeks self-advancement even at the expense of friendship. Timon is so "free" himself that he thinks all others so. In contrast to this nobility and trustfulness the play presents far-reaching evidence of the general selfishness of human

nature. Not only do men consume Timon's estate, the Poet and the Painter follow him to the woods in the hope of getting gold. They express the typical sentiment of men:

> Then do we sin against our own estate,
> When we may profit meet, and come too late. (V, 1, 44-45)

The deceit of men is emphasized further in the words of the churlish Apemantus, who wonders that "men dare trust themselves with men."

The sorrow Timon endures when he is disillusioned is comparable to that of King Lear, another character who, according to the Fool, should not have been old until he became wise in practical knowledge. King Lear took things to be what they seem until he was trapped by the feigned love of Goneril and Regan. In their grief both Timon and Lear turn away from society. Both look upon the world as a place devoid of honesty where chaos supplants order. Both cry out against the procreative forces of the universe. Both reflect upon the mere necessities of life. All else seems false. Distracted with grief, they address the elements of the natural world. They discard their clothes, the trappings of a vain civilization. Timon becomes a misanthrope. Having nothing, he says he has all things. Death is the way out, he says, for anyone who would be rid of affliction. For Timon "death is gain."

"Wisdom for a man's self," admits Francis Bacon, "is, in many branches thereof, a depraved thing: it is the wisdom of rats, that will be sure to leave a house somewhat before it fall: it is wisdom of the fox, that thrusts out the badger who digged and made room for him: it is wisdom of crocodiles, that shed tears when they would devour."[14] Obviously, in the light of such reasoning, "the plain and free and open"—such men as Timon of Athens—are likely to "ruine and betray both themselves and their People," if the gods "will give us some faults to make us men,"[15] they gave the Timons too much goodness, and this goodness, expecting to find its counterpart—not in all men surely, but in those who visited Timon as friends—proved his undoing.

In *Hamlet, Julius Caesar,* and other plays considered here, the importance of wariness is overshadowed by other

aspects of the play. *Timon of Athens* deals primarily with the danger that lies in excessive goodness; with the need for practical wisdom which gives man penetrating judgment against such evils as flattery and permits him to dissemble. Timon of Athens is "an honest lord brought low by his own heart." He is "undone by goodness" and the reason why he is undone is that "doubt and suspect were placed in his heart "too late." The play is an excellent embodiment of the practical outlook on life characteristic of the Renaissance.

Central College, Fayette, Missouri.

---

[1]*Rhetorica,* Ross ed., I, 12, 1372[b].

[2]*The Republic,* Jowett, tr., III, 408.

[3]*Precepts of Statecraft,* Loeb ed., 821, 28.

[4]*Of Wisdom,* George Stanhope, tr., 3 bks., London, 1697, Bk. III, p. 352. The original, *De la Sagesse,* was printed at Bordeaux in 1601. The translation by Samson Lennard was contemporary with Shakspere.

[5]*Op. cit.,* Bk. III, pp. 354-355.

[6]Charron, *op. cit.,* Bk. III, p. 354.

[7]*Op. cit.,* Bk. III, p. 355.

[8]In similar fashion Titus Andronicus becomes for a time the victim of dissimulation and craft. After the fray growing out of Lavinia's marriage he accepts the proffered friendship of the Emperor as genuine. He is later deceived by Aaron into cutting off his own hand, but when a messenger comes from the Emperor, with the hand and heads of his two sons, he becomes aware of his folly. From this point on Titus plies craft with craft. He does the thing recommended by Charron—he "retorts the Artifice" of the villains "back upon their own Heads." He overreaches them "in their own devices" (V, iii) although in doing so he loses his life.

[9]Hamlet's use of wariness against Rosenrantz, Guildenstern, and Polonius is only an apparent contradiction of the above. Hamlet knows that evil exists as a force and that hypocrisy is practiced by many courtiers seeking favor. Further, the Elizabethan dramatist does not always match details; he is concerned chiefly with the uppermost impression embodied in a play. ". . . the stronger accents seem naturally to catch our ears, so that our attention is drawn from the reasoning to the enthralling effect of the imagination. . . ." (Longinus, XV, 11.) See E. E. Stoll, *Art and Artifice in Shakespeare,* Cambridge Press, 1933, p. 19.

The fact that Hamlet trusts Laertes at the end, after he has discovered the plot Rosencrantz and Guildenstern attempts to carry out against him, is no more a flaw in character portrayal than are the two time schemes in *Twelfth Night* a flaw in structure. Elizabethan drama permits variation from the general impression. Moreover, Laertes is to be regarded as a noble but practical-minded character beguiled by the King into blaming Hamlet for the death of Polonius. Consenting to be ruled, he undertakes an exploit "ripe" in the King's "device." (See Act IV, sc. vii.) It is thus plausible that Hamlet and Laertes should become the instrument of each other's death but exchange forgiveness in their final moment of life.

[10]The use of craft is an important element in the structure of the plot. Throughout the play the King proceeds by means of craft, first to find out the cause of Hamlet's "lunacy" and afterwards to dispose of Hamlet in a way that will not arouse suspicion. Hamlet uses the "mousetrap" play to test the guilt of the King. He kills Polonius, believing that he has caught the King eavesdropping. When he sets out for England Hamlet resolves to let "the engineer be hoist with his own petar." In Acts IV and V "two crafts directly meet" (III, iv, 210), for the two principal characters recognize each other as enemies. Hamlet sends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to death when they come

Between the pass and fell incensed points

Of mighty opposites. (V, ii, 60-61).

His own death results from a device arranged by the King. Hamlet might have been full victor in the play had he foreknown that a man of Laertes' nobility could become an instrument of the King. Or through craft, like Titus Andronicus, he might have arranged the events from which the total catastrophe would have sprung.

[11]*Cf.* Cleremont's reply to Montsurry's request that he accept an oath:

Plain truth no place has
Where oaths are honorouble. (*Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois,* V, i)

[12]*Op. cit.,* Bk. III, p. 361.

[13]Charron, *op. cit.,* Bk. III, p. 352.

[14]In "Of Wisdom for a Man's Self."

[15]*Antony and Cleopatra,* V, ii, 32.